

Hunter 196

Chapter 196: Expanding in Scope

Jake's bloodline had been with him from the very first day of the system; heck, it had since his birth. It had saved his life more times than he could remember and been the catalyst that made his rise to power possible. But one had to remember that while a bloodline could most certainly be helpful, it wasn't always.

It wasn't a skill, and it wasn't regulated and controlled by the omnipotent system to make sure it wouldn't cause unnecessary harm to the user. Even the skills that could do so carried warnings such as Jake's own Limit Break.

So when Jake appeared back in his lodge, nothing was stopping his Sphere of Perception from feeding him everything within its influence – nothing but Jake and the other aspects of his bloodline.

Its range had expanded manifold after his evolution. Before D-grade, it had a radius of around 30 meters, but it was now 200 meters after his evolution. He saw the entire valley and its surroundings; he saw beneath the earth to a small cave-system running approximately 140 meters below him, and so much more.

All of these stimuli drilled themselves into his mind as he felt sick to his stomach from the sensory overload. It was far too much for him to handle, and his mind simply couldn't filter through it all. In the void where he evolved, his sphere had already expanded, but as it didn't really see anything, he hadn't taken notice of it.

Jake grit his teeth as he tried to comprehend everything and control his sphere. Even when it was only 30 meters, it was a bit much for him at times, and he rarely took notice of everything at once, but now after it had evolved, he had lost control of it.

He knew this was a horrible development, and he was utterly paralyzed as he tried to get his head under control. The first thing he did was enter meditation to cut off all his non-bloodline-related senses. He had long ago figured out how to make his sphere way more “passive” during meditation, and he tried to replicate that once more.

It helped a bit, but the influx of information was just too much. It was like a thousand pictures flashed before Jake’s eyes at every moment in a nauseating fashion. To make it worse, every small swaying blade of grass or rustle of a leaf was picked up double as he had trained himself and his sphere to take extra notice of movement before this evolution – a decision that had now come back to bite him in the ass.

Jake knew the pain he was experiencing wasn’t really in his head but in his soul. If it weren’t, he would have already plunged a dagger into his brain to make it stop and wait for his head to regenerate, but this wasn’t that kind of pain. He did everything he could to try and filter through everything, but it was slow.

There was one saving grace, however. Ever-so-slowly he began adapting as he subconsciously began filtering out the useless information in his head, and he knew that his own instinct of self-preservation kicked in – without a doubt the most prominent and influential part of his bloodline.

Like when he was meditating, he stopped picking up everything but only the most important. Smaller movements were filtered out, and ever-so-slowly, his headache lessened, and he became able to get at least a semblance of bearings.

It still took him over an hour before he got up and stood wobbling on the floor. He... he hadn’t expected the effects to be so extreme, even if a part of him had hoped for the bloodline to improve. Jake stood within his lodge as he closed his eyes and tried to focus a bit on the sphere again, and he felt a lot better about it already.

Perception skills were standard for most combat classes and even the ones that allowed some kind of spherical vision weren't that rare. In fact, Jake was beginning to suspect that the system hadn't offered him any from his class due to his bloodline, but that was a theory of his because he would sure as hell take one just to see how his bloodline would affect it.

Not that he needed a better sphere... because it was honestly just insane. When he closed his eyes, he could see everything around 200 meters in a radius around him. Perhaps a bit longer if he focused on perceiving something in a specific direction.

I guess I'll be pretty hard to sneak up on... even more than before, he internally joked as he rubbed his temple, still feeling the remnants of a killer-headache.

He took a seat in a chair as he relaxed his mind and got a good feel of his body for the first time. He felt overflowing with strength, but he also felt different on a qualitative level. It was like every single stat point mattered slightly more than before after his body had been reforged. He would compare it to having a hidden bonus increasing the effectiveness of all his stats, but by how much he didn't know, all he knew was that after the evolution, he felt nearly twice as strong overall... maybe even more. If Jake had to hypothesize, then those 200 to 220 in all stats from the title was just to set some kind of baseline of stats, even for those with weak classes and professions.

Jake was confident the evolution's effects would be more prominent in someone without his titles and high stats before evolving, but that didn't mean it wasn't a humongous gain for him.

Shaking his head, he returned to inspecting his body a bit more in-depth. His internals were still the same for the most part, with blood pumping through his veins and his heart beating in his chest... but he also got the feeling that a lot of it was for show. Many organs were gone and replaced with muscle or other fleshy things, but that didn't mean everything that remained was vital.

The brain was still essential, he could feel, but the rest were just... there. He felt like he could punch just as hard even if every single muscle in his arm were gone, even if it would expend a lot more stamina and likely even damage him to do so.

It wasn't entirely new, as he had been able to bypass many common physical barriers before. He had moved with broken bones, and even with a large part of his brain missing, he had been able to escape from the Indigo Fungus. At least half of his spine was missing back then, meaning he should have been paralyzed... he just wasn't. It was a weakness of the human body already removed at E-grade. Now, more such physical imperfections had been removed.

Jake was beginning to suspect that by C-grade or maybe B-grade, the body would be entirely for show, and he would be able to regenerate as long as just the smallest part of his body remained – assuming he had the health points, of course. Maybe he could even stay alive without his body as long as his metaphysical soul existed.

Exiting the depths of his own thoughts, he got up and finally did a bit of stretching, making his ever-the-more-useless muscles flex. He opened his hand and closed it a few times, feeling the power in it. If he had met himself of a day ago... it would be a slaughter.

D-grade was truly a divide.

He exited his lodge and instantly saw only Sylphie sitting there looking at him from on top of one of the trees. Sylphie flew down – yes, flew – and landed on his shoulder. Well, it was more gliding, but with a bit of wind magic, it was practically the same thing. He had been afraid the small hawk would be wary of him, but she just seemed happy that he had finally come out.

Jake rubbed the small bird, making her happy before he remembered something quite important. He remembered the weirdness of the mask during the evolution. How it had stayed on him in that weird realm, and how it had even absorbed some energy.

A part of him hoped it had evolved with him or something, but it didn't give him any more stats. It did keep giving 25% mana, which was great, as he knew some of these percentage amplifiers could get weaker after evolving.

After taking off the mask, he used Identify on it and didn't immediately notice anything off... but there was something.

[Mask of the Fallen King (Legendary)] – A mask born from the Records of the one once known as the King of the Forest; a mighty Unique Lifeform that died just as its path began. The mask is made of a wood-like material unique to the lifeform it comes from and does not obstruct vision when worn and regenerates itself from any damage taken. A Fallen King slumbers within. Enchantments: Living Wood. Passively absorbs mana in the atmosphere, increasing mana recovery rate by a large amount. Increases maximum mana by 25%.

Requirements: Soulbound

A Fallen King slumbers within... Jake thought, rechecking it a few times. Five words had been added that held a lot of meaning, and Jake's intuition practically screamed at him that this wasn't something he could just ignore.

Because what they implied wasn't simple: perhaps the King of the Forest wasn't truly dead.

Jake smiled as he looked up into the sky, shaking his head. It was fine... even if the King returned or the Unique Lifeform within the mask tried taking over his mind or something... he would be ready. It wasn't like he was going to be idle as the little King awakened.

He had two other evolutions to get to, after all.

"There is no shame in reaching your limits; we will all encounter that insurmountable wall one day," Jacob said as he placed his hand on the shoulder of the man who sat with tears in his eyes at a large forge.

"I just don't understand... I try my best every day, I use the best materials I can find, but I just get nowhere! What am I doing wrong!" the older-looking man said as he turned red in the face.

Jacob looked at the smith and understood his reluctance. To come to terms with your own shortcomings was difficult. The man had appeared like a promising smith, having worked in the profession before the system, and had quickly leveled up in his tutorial and afterward.

But... after reaching level 60 in his profession, he had begun slowing down, and now he had been stuck at 68 for three weeks. Jacob knew the man had reached the end of his potential, and he needed to do something drastic to break through his barrier... but he hadn't.

He said he had done his best, but the issue was that he needed to do better than his best. His forty years of experience before the system had brought him to his current level, but without developing further, he would be forever stuck where he was.

“Sometimes it isn’t a question of what one does right or wrong; things just are as they are. You talk as if your creations have gotten worse, that you are no longer the smith you once were... but you are. Without you, how many people would still lack a roof over their heads? How many families would still feel unsafe without you helping build the wall? You have done so many things for us already. You don’t need to push yourself to be better all the time; you are fine just as you are,” Jacob said comfortingly, his many skills on full display, affecting the man in ways both he and Jacob weren’t fully aware of.

“I... but why can’t I go further? What am I lacking?” the smith asked, still hoping to understand.

“You need a catalyst to bring about change, one you can only hope and strive for, but never expect. You will need to risk a part of yourself to achieve more. You will need sacrifice... but is that truly what you want? There are more ways to progress than simple levels, my friend,” the Augur spoke, continuing as the man motioned for him to elaborate.

“Instead of looking only at yourself, look towards the collective. You may be unable to gain a level yourself, but are you unable to make others gain strength? You have knowledge and expertise that would be priceless to countless aspiring smiths. This isn’t to say your own craftsmanship isn’t needed anymore. Weapons will always be in demand, the city will keep expanding for a long time to come, and it isn’t like your commissions have reduced over these last few weeks, have they?”

The smith looked at Jacob, still a bit unsure, before finally nodding.

“Things have been as usual... and I guess I have been hammering away for a while... maybe it’s fine to begin looking toward the next generation, those young ones could use someone more experienced to teach em,” he said with a bit of defeat in his voice, but also with newfound confidence.

“And I am more than certain they would welcome you with open arms to do so,” Jacob said before bowing to the man before turning to the door. “If you ever feel troubled, just come by the church. I am

sure either I or another will be able to help you, and once more, thank you for all you have done for Sanctdomo.”

“No, thanks to you, Augur,” the man said as he returned the bow, looking quite a bit more at peace than when Jacob had first come.

The Augur walked out and was greeted by a few guards who all bowed towards him. They used the word guard, but they were more of a police force than anything else, but thinking about it, weren’t guards of old just simplified policing?

As he walked through the cobble-stoned streets and observed the city, he took in the atmosphere and enjoyed the progress they had made over the last few months. After taking down the guarding D-grade, Jacob had claimed the Pylon and gained the Pioneering City Lord of Earth that awarded 16 free points a level. A reward for being one of the first ten to claim a Pylon on their planet.

That small Pylon had served as the fundament of the city they had ended up naming Sanctdomo. A fusion of the words “holy” and “home” in Latin. Jacob served as both the nominal and the spiritual leader of the city, though he did have many assistants in doing both those things.

It wasn’t easy leading a city with nearly 20 million citizens, after all.

If Jacob had to take a guess, then Sanctdomo had to be the largest city currently on Earth, and it was still expanding by the day. All those who had been blessed by gods from the Holy Pantheon had led their followers towards this city and brought along any they could on the way. There were even cases of those blessed by other gods giving way or following along, swearing allegiance. It was truly a testament to the size and influence of the Holy Church in the multiverse as a whole.

The massive growth of the city had naturally also resulted in enormous growth to himself. His profession and class worked in tandem quite well, which had resulted in him leveling quite fast... and being the first D-grade human of the city, if not Earth as a whole.

Not that Jacob saw it as any massive accomplishment himself... it was just his fate to grow as he did. He had even gone for the Perfect Evolution as his class and profession reached 99 at nearly the same time, and now his class had already reached 105, only a bit over a month after he evolved.

'DING!' Class: [Augur of Hope] has reached level 105 - Stat points allocated, +24 free points

Jacob's class wasn't the type to evolve like others but just stayed the same in name and function till the day his death is fated. There was no Grand Augur of Hope or Saint Augur of Hope or anything like that. An Augur of Hope was simply an Augur of Hope. He wasn't even able to choose another evolution. The day he became an Augur, he cut off all those paths to himself.

Not that he complained. While the class carried many limitations, none of them felt like such to him. Jacob did not want to fight, so his inability to do so was no handicap in his book. The stats were also as insane as before, providing him 24 in vitality, willpower, wisdom, and free points, giving him a total of 96, only 4 below the "absolute limit" he had read about.

As for his race, he had, of course, just become a D-grade human. An evolution to a different race for humans was notoriously tricky, and it wasn't even like it was necessarily better. Just different. But there was one place he did have a choice: with his profession.

And there, he had been offered just another straight upgrade to his profession.

'DING!' Profession: [Pioneering City Lord of Earth] has reached level 103 - +50 free points

Jacob did not feel demotivated, however. Due to the overlap of his Augur and City Lord roles, much of the experience he earned was split between them, and it also meant that the Records he relied on to evolve were shared. To gain both a supreme class and profession was difficult unless the two's paths were sufficiently different, such as a warrior with a smithing profession. Or a hunter with an alchemy profession.

Of course, it would take far longer to level both, and the individual would have to be multi-talented.

"Augur," a woman said as she bowed to him as he walked by, finally throwing him out of his stupor. It was one of the cathedral guards guarding the city's central building – the Holy Cathedral. She looked at him with fervor in her eyes, but Jacob just nodded in recognition as he walked through the massive gates.

He soon found himself within a large hall around a circular table with over a dozen men and women already sitting. Jacob was the last to arrive, as the smith had delayed him, yet none dared to speak up. He was the leader, after all.

He walked in and quickly took his seat in the high-chair, Bertram already standing beside it.

[Human – lvl 76]

Jacob spoke, getting their attention: "Let the meeting begin."

